STANLEY VESTAL

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FANDANGO

By Stanley Vestal

THE old-time West, the West of Kit Carson and the Santa Fé trail, lives again in these ballads by Stanley Vestal. Dealing with the earlier and more heroic period of the West, sincere in spirit and true to fact, they give a more vivid picture of the old frontier than many a volume of history. 'Fandango' is one of the finest collections of Western ballads that has been written.

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Fandango

Ballads of the Old West

FANDANGO

Ballads of the Old West

BY

STANLEY VESTAL

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TO
ISABEL

Note

Acknowledgments are made to *The American Mercury*, *Poetry: A Magazine of Verse*, and *The Southwest Review*, in whose pages certain of these ballads were first published.

Foreword

THESE ballads represent events of that earlier, more heroic age, when trick cowboys and professional gun-men were as yet unknown. This fact must be their justification.

To the casual glance, the ballad form may seem simple, unexacting. That illusion speedily gives way to a perception that the charm, the naïveté of the form lies less in diction and meter than in a certain large objectivity of the materials — a quality rarely achieved unless those materials are authentic. My ballads are as strictly true to the records of the Old West as the exigencies of balladry permit. I have tried to work within the conventions of the old English form, as illustrated by the best examples, thereby avoiding imitation of any particular poem in this kind.

But style and truth are not enough for poetry, and the balladist especially is likely to be betrayed by them unless he feels a profound affinity, an almost physical gusto, for the native savor of his subject-matter. Even so, his work will fall short if he fails to recapture, now and again, that rare epic glamor which in boyhood rested upon every prairie, butte, and lonely Indian camp.

STANLEY VESTAL

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Fandango

Ballads of the Old West

FANDANGO

SADDLE SONG

THERE'S a wonderful trail
That has never been trod —
I'm a-makin' it now!
A green trail over
The prairie sod —
I'm a-makin' it now!
Buffalo-wallow and buffalo-bean,
All mighty pretty — what do they mean?
Happiness is something
Nobody has seen —
I'm a-makin' it now!

OLIVER WIGGINS

'Twas at the Cimarron Crossing
On the trail to Santy Fee,
Kit Carson met up with a caravan
That was a sight to see.

The teamsters were all greenhorns,
The wagon-master a coward;
Their wagon-wheels were warped and shrunk,
Their guns were all smooth-bored.

The only man in the outfit
That had a speck of gall
Was a boy named Oliver Wiggins —
Fifteen, and six foot tall.

He was a-herdin' the cavvy,[1]
Ridin' a sore-backed mule,
Totin' a pistol long as your arm —
A runaway from school!

[1] 'A-herdin' the cavvy' — that is, driving the herd of spare animals at the rear of the column, the inevitable job of the greenhorn boy when crossing the plains.

The Kiowas come charging
To lift the teamsters' hair;
Kit and his men from the wagons then
Met the reds and stopped them there.

'Mount and after 'em, boys!' yelled Kit
As the redskins turned around;
At every bullet the trappers fired
Some Injun bit the ground.

The Carson men rode swift as the wind,
The Kiowas fled from harm;
In the front of the charge rode Oliver, poppin'
A pistol — long as your arm!

The wagon-master told the boy,
'You acted like a fool!
Them redskins might have took your hair,
And I'd ha' lost a mule!'

Oliver said, 'I want my pay —
I'm through with the wagon-train;
I'm going to Taos with the Carson men —
I'll not work for *you* again!'

'No, ye don't!' says the wagon-master,
'You'll go on to Santy Fee;
I've told Kit's men to leave us now —
To-night you sleep with me!'

Kit Carson made his camp that night
A mile from the wagon-park;
He sent Sol Silver to Oliver Wiggins
A little after dark.

'Would ye like to be one o' the Carson men
And travel along o' Kit?
He got his start on a mule like yourn
With a rope for bridle and bit.

'Wait till the greenhorns are all asleep
And you see Kit's camp-fire flare;
Then slip away from the wagon-train —
Come dawn, we'll be far from hyar.'

The wolves were howling loud and long,
The wagon-master snored,
When Oliver Wiggins slipped away
To where Kit's camp-fire roared.

Said Kit, 'My boy, I like your spunk;
I'll make a man of you;
I'll give you a rifle for that pop-gun,
And buckskins for your coat of blue.

'Shoot straight and tell the truth,' Kit said,
'Shoot straight, fight hard to win;
The Carson men are all like that —
They die, but don't give in.'

For twelve long years young Oliver
Served Carson true as steel;
The Indians caught the wagon-master
And burned him on a wagon-wheel.

LITTLE CHIEF

'THAR's Injun sign along the trail,
And Stone Calf's band is out;
Come day, them Cheyennes will be hyar —
Of that I make no doubt.

'If I had just ten o' my Carson men —
As now I have but three —
With fifteen greenhorns from Kansas City
I should not worried be.'

'Say, Kit, don't try to frighten us
And give our women a false alarm.
Why should the Indians bother us?
We never done them harm.'

'Stone Calf is out against the whites;
It's little he will care.
When he went down to the Army post,
The drunken Captain flogged him thar.

'Sol Silver, you must ride to-night
Harder a heap than ever you fowt;

Tell the dragoons at the Rayado
'Twas Stone Calf wiped us out.'

'But Kit, that is two hundred mile,
And it will soon be day;
I'd liefer stay with you and fight
Than mount and ride away.'

Come day, Kit sat upon the grass
And smoked with Stone Calf's braves;
The chief was painted fit to kill;
His cap with feathers waves.

'Smoke the pipe in peace, my braves,
Three times around the ring.
Then send the bullet from the gun,
The arrow from the string!'

Kit Carson knew their tongue as well
As if it were his native speech;
He sat and puffed the pipe with them —
His rifle was in reach.

The first time that the pipe went round
The women all began to cry;

The second time the pipe went round,
The men with fear were like to die;

The third time that the pipe went round,
Kit raised his rifle to his breast;
He jammed it in the chief's brown belly —
His courage bluffed the rest.

'Dogs!' Kit said, 'do you know me now?
Little Chief was the name you gave
When I was the hunter for Bent's Fort;
Many's the buck I've sent to his grave!

'You are many; we are few;
You can kill us if you try:
Lift a finger, if you dare;
I'll not be the first to die!

'Go look for sign when we are dead —
Go find Sol Silver's trail!
He's gone to call the bold dragoons —
They'll find you without fail!

'There'll be an empty lodge of yours
For every scalp you take this day;

Sol knows you — every Stone Calf brave —
He'll tell them who to shoot and slay!'

At Taos the greenhorns gave Kit choice
Of any present they could make.
Says Kit, 'I'm hungry as a boy —
I think I'll take a johnny cake!'

FANDANGO

They beat the tom-tom, they plucked the guitar,
The bandolin twanged for Dolores Salazar —
For her flashing teeth, for her midnight hair,
For her tiny shoes and brown legs bare,
Whirling red petticoat and thin white blouse —
The beauty and the terror of the Vale of Taos.

Young Dick Wooton was a mountain man,
A strappin' trapper with a skin of tan;
He stooped as he swung through the six-foot door,
His moccasins shuffled on the hard dirt floor:
'Look out, Pelados, fur I'm on my spree!
This here fandango belongs to me!'

Then he saw Dolores smiling slow,
And he stopped like a gut-shot Buffalo.
From Belly River to the Rio Grande
Grizzlies and Indians he had shot off-hand;
But her eyes cut deeper than he'd ever been hurt —
Deeper than the scars beneath his buckskin shirt —
So he drank (for she scared him worse than Death)
Three gourds of whiskey 'fore he caught his breath.

Then he grabbed Dolores like an angry bear,
He pranced and shuffled and he smelled her hair.
While the whiskey ran and the trappers howled,
And her Mexican lovers sulked and scowled,
She smiled at his chin and she smiled in his chest,
What he said she savvied, or else she guessed,
Until Dick, a-floating on a wave of bliss,
Lifted her up and gave her a kiss.

Then Don Cornelio began the fray —
His knife-blade glittered in a wicked way —
And Dick, all paralysed with fright,
Was happy again, for he loved a fight.
He yelped a war-whoop, let Dolores fall,
He bashed Cornelio against the wall:
'Come on, Pelados! Jine the spree,
Fur this fandango belongs to me!'

'Twas six to a hundred or thereabout —
Fists were flying and knives were out —
Kit Carson caught up the drummer's chair,
Gripped each leg and broke it off square,
Yelled as he handed them round to each one,
'Give 'em Green River!' and began the fun.

The women screamed and choked up the door;
Pelados were lying all over the floor;
The music stopped and the lights blinked out;
Kit and his comrades raised a shout,
Felled the men who blocked their path,
And left a trail like the Day of Wrath.

Back in the house where their rifles stood
They laughed and swore and wiped off the blood,
Jeered at the Prefect and the mob outside,
Paid blood-money for the man who had died,
Tipped the priest for the masses said
For the soul of the stabber who now lay dead,
Posted a sentry at either door,
Spread out blankets and lay down to snore.

But little thought Dick Wooton gave
To the broken heads and the new-made grave.
Melancholy as a bull in spring,
What to him could sunup bring
But a lonely ride on the trails afar
And dreams of the lovely Salazar?
For well he knew that her folks would ban
A match with a Gringo mountain man.

The chill gray dawn was over all —
Mountain and meadow and 'dobe wall —
When Kit and his comrades took their way
Out of the town of Taos next day.
The streets were lined with a sullen throng,
Jealous, and smarting with sense of wrong;
But nobody stirred to do them harm,
For each one rode with rifle on arm.

Dolores stood by her father's house,
Quieter since last night's carouse;
But under her gay reboso's fold
Her heart was pounding, her eyes were bold,
Though brothers and lovers on either side,
Bitter and scowling, watched Dick ride.

Kit saw what ailed Dick Wooton's heart;
Kit slapped him on the back right smart:
'Ho, Dick! Are you wantin' to trap a squaw?
Bent's Fort's a-waitin' on Arkansa —
Hyar's the gal, and yonder's the trail,
If you ain't scairt of the Prefect's jail.'

Dick stooped from his saddle to say good-bye,
Whispered her ear and looked in her eye;

She flashed him a smile like the break of morn,
Reached her hand to his saddle-horn,
Placed her foot on his moccasin —
He caught her, and struck his spurs well in.

Her mother squealed, and her father swore,
Her lovers rushed past the open door —
But Kit rode there with his rifle, grim,
And nobody wanted to tackle *him*.

Dick and Dolores waved farewell
To her people crowding the streets pell-mell:
'Adios, Pelados, fur I've had my spree,
And this here beauty belongs to me!'

Note: On trapper slang:

(1) Fandango — a dance, fight, or lively meeting.

(2) 'Give 'em Green River' — Mountain men preferred knives bearing the trade name Green River on the blade next the hilt. A thrust up to Green River was generally fatal.

(3) Pelados — Greasers — a reference to the oil on the hair of young Mexican dandies.

SAN PASCUAL

KEARNY sat trapped at San Pascual;
His men had neither drink nor bread.
'If we cannot get word to San Diego,
We are all as good as dead!'

Up and spoke Lieutenant Beale —
A sailor bold was he —
'I'll carry the word to San Diego;
My Indian boy will go with me.'

'You be a bold sailor, Beale;
A bold sailor sure you be;
But now we need a crafty plainsman —'
Kit Carson said, 'Send me!'

They tucked their shoes into their belts
And crawled along the rocky ground;
For two long miles through the evening dusk
The Spanish sentries rode around.

The foremost sentry that they passed,
They heard the Spanish captain say,

'Scour every foot of the hillside, men,
For that wolf Kit will get away!'

The second sentry that they passed,
They left their canteens by the trail;
Kit heard Beale's heart-beat miss a jump —
His own heart did not fail.

The very last sentry that they passed
Stopped to light a cigarette
With a blazing match that showed them plain —
That night they'll not forget!

Beale whispered, 'Kit, let's jump and fight —
Our time has come to die!'
But Kit said, 'No. I've seen worse times;
Our friends on us rely.'

For two long miles they crept and crawled
To reach the shelter of the trees.
Their feet were full of cactus spines;
The cactus spines were in their knees.

'Once among the sheltering trees,
Our way we cannot lose.'

But when they reached the trees at last —
They had lost their shoes!

Thirty miles they limped that night;
The road was rocks or cactus-bed;
When they saw the lights of San Diego,
Beale was almost out of his head.

Kit said, 'We cannot run nor fight;
If we are taken, all is lost:
Each one must try his luck alone;
I'll go the long way — you're hurt most.'

Kearny sat with his starving men
And dreamed of distant scenes.
He heard the tramp of a column coming:
'Thank God! Kit made it! The marines!'

KIT CARSON OF THE U.S.N.

Frémont talked with the Commodore
On his ship at Monterey:
'They sent me out on a scouting trip
And I've captured California!

'I had no orders for to fight —
Didn't know the war was on!'
The Commodore said, 'You did right;
I like what you have done.

'But I am in command here —
I rank you, don't forget;
You'll have to serve in the Navy now,
Though your feet were never wet!'

Said Frémont, 'All the men I brought
Had never seen the sea;
They called it a big prairie
Without a single tree!'

'Never you mind,' said the Commodore,
'I'll muster them in to-day;

I'll make them the Navy Battalion
Of Mounted Infantry!'

He loaded them into the sloop Cyane
And sailed away that day
To capture San Diego
Four hundred miles away.

Kit Carson lay in the scuppers
As sick as man could be,
And every man in the outfit
Was just as sick as he.

Kit groaned, 'If I could get to land,
I'd never ask to be
A recruit in the Navy Battalion
Of Mounted Infantry!'

Said Kit, 'If I could get to land
And stand on the firm prairie,
I'd ruther fight all the Kioways
Alone, than go to sea!'

When they got to San Diego
The Spaniards ran away;

It was lucky for Kit and the other men
Of the Mounted Infantry.

For the sea had made them as quiet
As any Quaker's grave;
They were so weak that one old woman
Could have thrown them in the wave.

Kit Carson was sent to the President
With news of the victory —
Glad to escape from the Navy Battalion
Of Mounted Infantry!

RIDING SONG

The cowboy rides a-standin' up,
  The jockey on his nose;
The soldier sits on his saddle-soap,
  The Indian on his clothes.
But me, I ride whenever I can
  Any old time, any old where,
Any old seat, like any old man,
  Any old thing with hair!

THE STRONG HEART

'Twas at the Kiowa Sun Dance,
All on the broad prairie:
The spirits moved the medicine-man
To utter prophecy.

'Some terrible thing is about to come —
Some terrible thing!' he cried;
A sudden spasm doubled him up,
And then and there he died.

The Cheyenne chief stood in the throng;
His wife and sons stood near;
He saw the dying medicine-man,
He read the message clear.

Loud he shouted above the song,
Loud above the drum —
'Break your camps and run away —
The cholera has come!'

Before the mules were loaded,
Before the tents were down —

The living were the dying
All through the Indian town.

They left their tepees standing,
Filled with a nameless dread;
North, south, east, west, they scattered —
The wolves were at their dead.

All day across the prairie
They fled with might and main;
All day their panic trail was marked
By the bodies on the plain.

That night, along the Cimarron,
They rested, one and all;
And loud the squaws were wailing,
And fast the warriors fall.

The Cheyenne chief rode up and down
And watched his people die;
He saw the mourners gash themselves,
He heard the orphans cry.

'Many a battle I have fought,
Many a charge I've made;

My people I've defended well —
No man calls me afraid!

'If I knew where to find this thing
That lays my people low,
I'd kill it or die fighting it
Like any other foe!'

Proudly his war-horse strides along,
Gaily his feathers glance;
His round red shield is on his arm;
He shakes his mighty lance.

Even as he rode so proudly brave,
With helpless lance on high,
The cholera struck him from his horse —
The buzzards watched him die.

This is the story that is told
By those who escaped away,
When half the Indians on the plains
Perished in a day.

Many a warrior bravely died
In many a vanished year;
But none more bravely than the chief
Who faced the nameless fear.

'RAPAHO GAL

It was on old Green River,
The trappers' rendezvous —
Bully Shunar just for fun
Thrashed a man or two.

'All Americans are cowards —
Leave 'em in the ditch;
Any skunk that interferes
I'll cut a stick and switch!'

Kit Carson's ears heard Bully's talk;
Kit's cold blue eye could see
That the threat was meant for himself alone
On account of his bride-to-be.

Her spotted pony through the ford
Waded splash and splash;
The sleigh bells on her bridle rein
At every pace went chink and clash;

Her glossy hair shone rifle-bright,
Her face was painted fair to see;

The fringes over her silver belt
Hung down below her knee.

'Rapaho Gal sat in the lodge:
'Where are you going, my lover Kit?'
'I'm going to pistol a rattlesnake —
One of my friends is bit.'

'Beware of his fangs, my lover Kit —
He's treacherous and low —
The orneriest snake of a mountain man
Ever worked a woman woe!'

''Rapaho Gal, for you I fight —
He craves you for his bed;
There will never be peace on old Green River
Till him or me is dead.'

Kit jumped onto his buffalo horse,
The swiftest in his band;
He went looking for Bully Shunar
With his pistol in his hand.

Bully Shunar was no coward —
He raced across the land

With his rifle laid along his thigh
Ready to shoot off-hand.

'Where are you ridin' so fast, Bully?
Maybe you're lookin' for me?'
The dirty liar answered, 'No!'
And fired along his knee.

Though Kit was quick, the bullet grazed,
The powder burned his cheek;
But Bully Shunar tumbled down
And never more will speak.

'My lover Kit, my heart is good
To see you safe and sound;
Come into the lodge, my lover dear,
And I will dress your wound.'

''Rapaho Gal, no more you'll go
In terror of your life;
The rattlesnake is cold and dead,
And you're Kit Carson's wife!'

MISTRESS WHITE

Did you never hear of the merchant White
  Who traded out of Santa Fé —
How the false Apaches took his life
  And carried his bride away?

Their chief has taken the merchant's scalp
  And made a necklace of his teeth;
When the word was brought to Major Grier,
  He belted sword and sheath.

He called Kit Carson from the ranch;
  Boots and saddles the bugles play;
'The false Apaches have murdered White,
  But we'll save his lady, if we may.'

Kit said, 'They have a week the start;
  We'll have to ride with speed;
What that poor lady must have borne,
  It makes my heart to bleed!'

'Twas bitter cold November;
  The snow lay on the plain;

Twelve days and nights they followed fast —
It seemed they could not gain.

Said Kit, 'Of all that ever I saw
This is the hardest trail;
The false Apaches scatter far
To meet again like quail.

'I feel a norther coming —
The snow will soon begin to fall;
If we don't strike their camp to-day,
We'll never strike at all.'

They saw the Apache fires at dusk
A-shinin' just ahead.
Kit yelled, 'Come on! Surprise 'em, boys,
Or the lady will be dead!'

The troopers waited for commands;
The Major senseless lay;
A ball had struck on his belt buckle
And taken his breath away.

Kit charged the Apache camp alone;
She heard the hoofs and up she sprang;

She ran to meet her rescuer;
  Her heart within her sang.

She had not taken seven steps —
  Her Apache captor drew his bow;
With a cruel arrow through the heart
  He laid the lady low.

'Burn the camp,' said Kit to his men,
  'Our naked foes have run away;
The judgment of God will punish them —
  His blizzard comes to-day.

'What this sweet lady suffered
  No human tongue could tell;
Only the stroke of Death himself
  Could lighten such a hell.

'Lower down her wasted form
  While the snow falls on the sod;
Oh, the sorrows of her face!
  'Tis well she is with God!'

KIT CARSON'S MULE

Sol Silver roped a maverick mule
To saddle for his squaw.
Says he, 'This stray belongs to me,
For that is prairie law.'

Bill Pilka grabbed the lariat
Right out of Silver's hand:
'The rope was mine; by mountain law
The mule goes in my band!'

They talked of plains and mountain law
From afternoon till night;
For that poor mule the trappers
Got ready for to fight.

Kit Carson knew the animal;
Says he, 'Boys, don't make trouble —
That mule is one I lost last year,
Or else I'm seein' double.'

Pilka and Silver said, 'As sure
As this rope's made of hair,

If it's your mule, that settles it;
Kit's word's good anywhere.'

Kit answered, 'I don't want her, boys;
That mule's too poor to pack.
We don't need meat, and if we did,
She wouldn't make a snack.'

Pilka and Silver grabbed their guns:
'If Kit won't have her, then
Step out along the prairie grass —
We'll settle it like men!'

Kit said, 'You wait till mornin' —
You cain't shoot straight by night.
That crazy mule ain't worth the powder
You'd burn if you's to fight!'

Kit worried when on guard that night,
A-leanin' on his gun;
He knew a friend would surely die
At the risin' of the sun.

The dawn was comin', slow and gray —
They heard Kit's rifle bang:

Every man was wide awake
And under cover sprang.

'I seen an Injun in the brush
And throwed him in his tracks!
Sol, you and Pilka look for him
Behind them red sumachs.'

Sol and Pilka scouted round;
Kit smiled, he was that proud.
They went a-scowlin' to the brush;
They came back laughin' loud.

They slapped Kit on the shoulder —
They called him 'greenhorn,' 'fool.'
'Why, Kit, that Injun that you throwed
Was nothin' but your mule!'

GOVERNOR BENT

Kit Carson is lighted from his horse
In the town of Santy Fee:
'What ails you men to stand so still?
What makes you stare at me?'

'Oh, Kit, where have you been so long?
You've been too long away!
There has been bloody murder done —
It was a dreadful day!'

'I've come from California
The quickest it was ever done;
With letters for the President
I rode from sun to sun.'

'But didn't the wind that whistled by
Give warning on your way?
And didn't your dead come whispering you
About the break o' day?

''Twas in the Spanish town of Taos
An hour before the dawn,

The coward mob has broken your door
And into your house is gone!'

'But why did they go to Taos?' said Kit,
'They were safe in Santy Fee;
Was there no man in all the town
To shield my family?'

'They went with Governor Bent to Taos —
Three women and a boy of ten,
Two children, and the Governor —
There were no other men.'

'Oh, why did he go to Taos?' Kit said,
'He had been warned of treachery;
Why did he go to Taos alone —
Alone among his enemy?'

'The Governor loved his people there,
Had fed them at his board;
When they were sick, he tended them —
Why should he doubt their word?

'The mob smashed at the inner door,
The Governor opened wide —

"What is it, friends?" "We want your head!
Your Gringo head!" they cried.

'The women pled with Governor Bent
To fight; his boy of ten
Came lugging out an old shot-gun,
With "Papa, let us die like men!"

'"Fight!" she cried to her husband then,
"Shoot the hounds and fly!
There is no man on Western soil
With truer hand or eye!"

'She put his pistols in his hands —
He laid them both away:
"If I resist, they'll murder *you;*
They'll kill me, anyway."

'"Cowards," screamed the woman, facing the mob,
"Will you strike his old gray head?
What good could it do your people,
If the Governor were dead?"

'The Indians answered never a word,
Bullets and arrows fly;

With stones and slings they battered him,
And still he did not die.

'The women in the inmost room
Dug like mad at the 'dobe wall
With a poker and an old iron spoon
To make a hole through which to crawl.

'He faced them in that outer room
With empty hands and bleeding head;
Of fifty scoundrels in that mob
Was not a man dared strike him dead.

'"The hole is dug," the women called,
"Come quick, the way is clear!"
He barred the door against the mob:
"Go first, and never fear!"

'The greasers thundered on the door;
The shutters broke and fell;
Their axes crashed upon the roof;
He heard the dastards yell.

'Just as the last of his women-folk
Crept through the narrow breach,

The door crashed down, the mob rushed in,
She heard the blood-lust screech.

'They cut his head off from the trunk,
His scalp off from the head;
They went dancing through the streets
Because a man was dead.'

'But why are we talking here?' Kit asked,
'Arm and ride with me!
The scalps of the men who done this thing
Are the prettiest sights I'll ever see!'

'Do you think we stood and talked?' they said,
'We were sixty-seven strong;
We met and bested fifteen hundred
Of them that done the wrong.

'We chased them home to their Mission Church;
The dragoons brought cannon through;
We smashed their fort to smithereens,
And hanged them two by two.'

'I'd liefer ha' been in that fight,' Kit said,
'Than to drink with the President;

My saddle-bags are full of his mail,
But I wish some other had been sent.

'I'd rather ha' been in that house,' said Kit,
'To stand by the side o' Bent
With a few of my trusty Carson men
Than to be President.

'Bent was a sure-enough gentleman;
He saved the lives of them I love;
As sure as I'm a Christian man,
His soul has gone above!'

BEECHER ISLAND
1868

Roman Nose sat in the painted lodge
  Feasting with his kin;
The woman served forbidden food —
  'That breaks my medicine!'

'A hundred hard-fought battles
  Have proved that powerful charm
Prayed into the warbonnet
  That has kept my life from harm!'

A runner, breathless: 'Roman Nose,
  The whites are fierce, but few;
They lie entrenched in the river-bed —
  Our warriors wait for you!'

He answered, 'Tell them not to wait;
  My bonnet I must purify:
If I go into the fight to-day,
  I shall surely die!'

He rode to the hill by the battle-ground
  And watched the circling fights;

It was hard to see his warriors fall
At the rifles of the whites.

An old chief said, 'So here's the man
They say will always dare!
Look yonder towards the river-bed —
Your friends are dying there!

'Your friends are falling in the fight —
They called you brave and true —
Can you sit here and watch them die?
Those men belong to you!'

Roman Nose stared across the plains —
Far-off his lodge-fire smoked —
Proudly he eyed the angry man,
Then laughed, as though he joked:

'My friends, you hear the old man's words —
'Tis true, what he would say.
Therefore I go, although I know
That I shall die to-day.'

He took the bonnet from its case —
The powerful charm was gone —

He shook the glorious plumage free,
  Mounted, and cried, 'Come on!'

Down the hill to the river-bed
  The warriors swept away —
Down the hill to the river-bed,
  Where the waiting rifles lay:

The long tails of his warbonnet
  Swept the sands of the river-bed —
When the smoke and dust had cleared away,
  Roman Nose was dead!

They carried him back to the wailing camps —
  On a scaffold lone and high
They left him, armed like a warrior
  Unafraid to die.

THE DEATH OF SATANK

General Sherman at old Fort Sill,
He frowned with angry brow:
'Who led that raid into Texas?
Tell me now!'

The Kiowa chief jumped to his feet,
The fire flashed from his eyes:
'If any other claims that raid,
That man lies!

'My young men must be taught to fight;
My young men killed seven;
We lost three men on that bloody raid;
We're willing to call it even.'

Sherman arrested the Kiowas;
He put the handcuffs on:
'You're going to prison in Texas
To pay for the deeds you've done!'

'No! Tell my people I am dead!
I'll never go to jail!

They'll find my bones the first day out
Beside the trail!'

The prisoners rode in the wagons,
On each side the soldiers filed;
'I am a warrior and a chief —
They treat me like a child!

'See yonder tree beside the trail
A little way ahead?
I'll never go beyond that tree,
But there lie dead!'

The old man sang his death-song then;
His voice rang clear and high:
'*Oh Sun, thou endurest forever,*
But we who are warriors must die!'

He wrenched the irons from his bleeding wrists;
He rushed them with his knife;
The drivers jumped and dropped their guns,
But the soldiers took his life.

He fell upon the bloody ground
Without one cry.
'*Oh Sun, thou endurest forever,*
But we who are warriors must die!'

THE WOMAN ON THE BLANKET

'Tis Warpath La Tour in the Cheyenne camp
On the River Picketwire;
He slants his eyes at Bull Tongue's squaw,
He burns with fierce desire.

For he is a rich and handsome breed
Has made the women sigh;
And Bull Tongue's wife she looks at him
From the corner of her eye.

He shuffles the deck of horse-hide cards,
He deals with practiced hand:
'Put de woman on de blanket —
I'll lay my whole horse-band;

'I've won your ponies, lodge, and robes —
By Gar, I got your gun!
Put de woman on de blanket —
I'll lay you all I won!'

Bull Tongue looks at the cards he holds —
He is a powerful buck;

He thinks, 'I'll win, but if I lose,
My lance will change his luck!'

Bull Tongue's wife she never moves
Where she is sitting by;
She looks from her man to the handsome breed
From the corner of her eye.

The cards are down, the game is done:
'By Gar, my luck she fine!
I nevair play a bettair game —
Dees woman, she is mine!

'Hey, woman, pack my winnin's up
On de ponies I have won;
We got a heap o' trail to make
Before the set o' sun.'

Bull Tongue walks wailing through the camps,
His people hear him cry —
'Take pity on your brother,
Left naked to the sky!'

La Tour is over the hill and gone —
He sees a dust behind:

'Mebbeso Bull Tongue come for you;
Ride on, and nevair mind!

'I guess he tink too much of you
To let you go so queeck —
You say you goin' be my woman? . . .
I'll mak dat Bull Tongue seeck!'

A herd of mules comes galloping
Across the dusty plain:
'La Tour, I bring you all these mules,
And take my wife again.'

'By Gar, dees woman, she is mine!
I tink you steal dose mule;
Eef you wan' keep your womans,
Don' gamble lak a fool!'

'La Tour, you dealt me skin game;
I think you don't play fair;
You give me back my woman —
Or I will take your hair!'

'You dam ol' Bull Tongue, you talk beeg —
You talk lak prairie-fire!

By Gar, when I begin to fight,
You'll run to de Picketwire —

'You whine about your woman, hey?
You tink I don' play fair?
Sacre! Dees woman, she is mine,
And now I tak *your* hair!'

Warpath picks his rifle up
That lies across his lap;
He draws a bead on Bull Tongue's head,
But it just goes snap.

Bull Tongue quirts his pony,
His long sharp lance in rest —
He leaps to plant his weapon
In Warpath's breast.

Warpath clubs his rifle-butt
Across the pony's face;
He gets the lance-head in his thigh,
Pulls Bull Tongue from his place —

'By Gar, you draw first blood, my frien',
But eef I geet your knife,

Mebbeso you don' wan' womans den —
I tink you wan' your life!

'By Gar, you say I don' play fair?
I play de skin game, hey?
Eef I geet my fingers in your hair,
I skin your head to-day!'

At the trading post, the trader said,
'What for you fight to-day?
Your pony was the better horse,
You might have run away.'

'*Enfant de garce! Me* run away?
He come to tak my hair!
You tink I run away from heem
An' leave my *woman* dair?'

The trader says, 'You'll pay a price
To keep your handsome wife;
Ain't you afeard that Bull Tongue's friends
Will try to take your life?'

La Tour he shrugs his shoulders;
He grins and slaps his chest —

'*Sacre!* *My* woman, an' *my* horse
An' me is *all* de best!

'My frien', eef any Injuns come,
By Gar, I nevair mind;
Eef dey hunt for me an' trouble —
It don' tak long to find!'

BELLE STARR

Far from his friends the bandit died;
John Morris fired the shot:
'We'll have to bury him right away —
The weather is so hot.

'Far from his friends I lured him off —
None knew him here in life;
None here can swear that this was Jim —
Nobody but his wife!'

They carried the word to the bandit's wife;
Her face grew bleak and hard:
'He killed my man for the price on his head —
He'll never get the reward!

'A week ago John Morris slept
Under our roof — a guest!
The hound! If he is paid for this,
Jim's soul will never rest!'

She rode alone to the house of death;
She stood beside the dead;

John Morris and his pals fell back,
But she never turned her head.

She lifted the sheet from the face she'd loved
Since first she was a bride:
Those arms that clung around her once
Lay stiffly by his side.

With iron will she ruled herself —
No tear fell from her eye;
They looked at her, astonished —
She did not even sigh.

She smiled a bitter, scornful smile,
And dropped the sheet again:
'It seems you've murdered the wrong man —
I'm sorry, gentlemen.

'John Morris, if you want to get
The price on my man's head,
You'll have to find and take him first —
Alive or dead!'

Then slowly, slowly she walked out,
And slowly rode away,

And bravely hid a breaking heart
That lovely summer's day.

From the far hilltop she looked down —
Game girl that would not yield —
While Morris, cursing, buried Jim
In the Potter's field.

CYNTHIA ANN

To Parker's Fort in Texas
Comanches came riding one day;
They captured poor little Cynthia Ann,
They carried her far away.

Oh, freedom is sweet on the prairie!

When she was grown, she married the chief —
The Wanderer loved to roam;
At last the troopers rescued her —
They sent her home.

Oh, freedom is sweet on the prairie!

Come spring, she sat in her father's house;
Her thoughts were far away.
'My people are making new lodges now
On the prairie,' she would say.

Come summer, she sat at her father's door,
Lonely enough to cry.
'My people are running buffalo now
On the prairie,' she would sigh.

Come autumn, she sat in her father's yard,
Sadly she would chafe:
'My people are on the warpath now —
Oh, Quanah, my son, are you safe?'

Come winter, she stood at her father's gate;
The snow fell fast above.
'Nokoni, my husband, you're needing things
I'd make to show my great love.

'Oh, Nokoni, my husband, The Wanderer,
My father is good to me;
But I long to be out on the plains with you —
In our lodge on the wide prairie!

'My lips are still on your lips,
Though you are far away;
I cannot come to you, Nokoni,
And here I cannot stay!'

She laid her down upon the bed —
Her voice was low and weak:
'My people wait for my spirit now
On the prairie,' they heard her speak.

She laid her lonesome body down
Where it had pined away;
She died with her face to the open plain;
They buried her next day.

Oh, freedom is sweet on the prairie!

Quanah Parker was her son,
The raider and the chief;
Many a Texan lost his life
To pay for Cynthia's grief.

BOGGY DEPOT

It was at Boggy Depot
The dawn of a summer's day —
The Marshal came a-riding
From the city far away.

The Marshal came a-riding
On his pony up the trail:
'I want the man who shot Bill White,
For he must hang in jail!'

The Indians held a pow-wow —
The chiefs talked long and loud;
The Marshal was a lonesome man
In that great crowd.

'The man you want who shot Bill White
Is our tribesman true;
Though he is a murderer,
He shall not go with you.

'Our law is, never to give up
Our brother to the stranger,

And if you try to take him now
Your own life is in danger.

'Yet, since our brother murdered Bill –
As he does not deny —
We ourselves will kill him,
And you shall see him die!'

They led him out before the crowd;
They stripped him to the waist;
In white pipe-clay a round mark
Above his heart was placed.

The Captain of the warriors
Stepped forth with shaft and bow;
There was no sound in all the camp
But leaves that rustled low.

The prisoner stood unbound, erect,
He neither spoke nor stirred:
The Captain drew his arrow back —
The bowstring whirred.

Back from Boggy Depot
At noon that summer's day
The Marshal went a-riding
To the city far away.

SADDLE SONG

King David rode a sorrel mare,
His saddle-horn was gold.
Wherever he went, with an old jawbone
He knocked the sheep-men cold.

Bum along, bum along —
Hi! Let's go!
King David says, 'Let's go!'

King David crawled into the cave
And clipped King Saul's shirt-tail.
He sent it back with word, 'I'm Dave —
You can't put me in jail!'

Bum along, bum along —
Hi! let's go!
King David says, 'Let's go!'

King David's son camped on his trail
To steal the old man's mare;
But the dog-gone fool, a-ridin' a mule,
Got hanged in his own hair!

Bum along, bum along —
Hi! Let's go!
King David says, 'Let's go!'

King David sat around the ranch
And watched U. Riuh's wife;
He put that boy to ridin' herd
Where the rustlers took his life.

Bum along, bum along —
Hi! Let's go!
King David says, 'Let's go!'

King David died a good old man —
He's been a long time dead,
With his saddle-blanket over him,
His saddle under his head.

Bum along, bum along —
Hi! Let's go!
King David says, 'Let's go!'

KIT CARSON'S LAST SMOKE

Kit Carson came to old Fort Lyons
Sick as he could be:
'Make me a bed of buffalo robes
On the floor in the corner,' says he;

'Make me a bed of buffalo robes
Like we used along the trail;
I thought to ha' lived for a hundred year,
But my heart is beginning to fail;

'I ought to ha' lived for a hundred year,
But the strength in my legs is done;
I swelled the veins in them long ago
When the Blackfoot made me run.

'Take care of my children, *compadre*,
I've taken my last ride;
Bury my bones in good old Taos
By my dear Josephine's side.

'I leave you my Cross-J cattle,
My house and ranch, and the rest;

Tell Wiggins, and Tom, and the Carson men
That I always loved them best.

'Now cook me some first-rate doin's —
I'm tired of this sick man's feed;
A buffalo steak and a bowl of coffee
And a pipe are what I need.'

The Army doctor shook his head
And looked Kit in the eye:
'General, now, you ought to know,
If you eat that meal, you'll die!'

'I never was scairt of death,' says Kit;
His eye was cold and blue;
'I've faced it many's the time,' he said;
They knew his words were true.

'There war times when the Injuns bested me;
There war times when I run like sin;
But I never took fright of a square meal yet,
And it's too late now to begin.

'I'd ruther die on my pins,' Kit said,
'With the bull meat under my belt,

Than to die in my bed by inches
Like a beaver trapped for his pelt.'

They brought him a big thick buffalo steak:
He ate it every bite.
He smacked his lips when he drank the coffee,
And swore it tasted right.

'Will you have your meerschaum, General,
Or your Cheyenne calumet?
Will you have the pipe that Frémont gave,
Or what pipe shall we get?'

'Get me my old black clay, Sherrick;
Give me my old dudheen;
It has been over many a trail with me;
It has seen what I have seen.'

He has packed the baccy in the bowl,
Inhaled the smoke so blue;
A happy smile spread o'er his face —
That face so bold and true.

He smoked the pipe out to the end
And brushed the ashes off.

Then Death (whose bullets could not kill)
Killed Kit with a little cough.

The ladies of that lonely post
They loved him one and all;
One gave her satin wedding-gown
To line his coffin-wall.

The ladies on that winter day
For love of one so brave
Pulled from their bonnets all the flowers
To strew upon his grave.

He was happy when he died,
And brave and true alive.
God send the West a many such
To make our country thrive!

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HENRY HERBERT KNIBBS

Poet and Novelist of the West

HENRY HERBERT KNIBBS was born in Canada, came to the United States at the age of twenty-one, and became a naturalized citizen. He did whatever work he could get: in an iron foundry, as a traveling salesman, as private secretary. It was while in the last position that he tried the writing game. He was thirty-five at the time, and, throwing up his job, he went to Cambridge and took a course in English literature and rhetoric at Harvard University. At the end of the course he invested all his worldly wealth in a canoe and camping equipment and departed with his wife for the Canadian wilderness in order to get atmosphere for his stories. In 1911 they went to California, where they now live, tramping, camping, canoeing, hunting, fishing.

It is not to be wondered that when reading Mr. Knibbs's stories and poems the heroes and riders of the West live before our very eyes.

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